

CHAPTER 33

Al-Ahzâb: The Allies

(REVEALED AT MADÍNAH: 9 sections; 73 verses)

This chapter goes under the name of *The Allies*, by which are meant the Quraish, confederated with other idolatrous tribes and the Jews. The opponents had now planned to exterminate the Muslims altogether, and mustering more than ten times the available Muslim force, they besieged Madînah. The battle, therefore, occupying as it does a most prominent place in the early history of Islâm, richly deserves the importance it has been accorded.

The battle of the Allies took place in *Shawwâl* of the fourth year of the Hijrah, and the revelation of this chapter therefore belongs to that year. Most of the other subjects treated herein, such as those relating to the Prophet's marriage with Zainab and to his marriages in general, might be fixed a little later, but they cannot be placed beyond the seventh year of the Hijrah. The reason why this chapter occupies this place in the arrangement of the chapters of the Qur'ân is quite obvious. The last group of Makkan chapters preceding this announces a series of mighty prophecies foretelling the subsequent greatness of the Muslims, and here we are shown how the forces employed to crush Islâm were made ineffective, thus paving the way for the Muslims to attain the promised greatness.

The first section deals with physical and religious relationship in reference to the religious relationship of the Prophet with the faithful. The powerful attack of the Quraish and their allies on the Muslims, spoken of in the second and third sections, was really a resort to brute force made with the object of annihilating Islâm. Its mention is really meant to give a death-blow to the false propaganda that Islâm was spread by the sword, the fact being that Islâm spread in spite of the sword. The propaganda now carried on against Islâm stands on two pillars of misrepresentation, the first relating to the sword and the second relating to the Prophet's domestic life, which propaganda depicts the Prophet as being voluptuary. As a matter of fact, not only did the Prophet himself retain the utmost simplicity of life to his last days, no change coming over him though he had

risen to be the ruler of the whole of Arabia, but he would not allow even his wives to depart from that high standard of simplicity. It was within his means to furnish his wives with every material comfort, but instead of pandering to their earthly desires, he informed them that if they required such provisions, he could not retain them in his household. This is the subject-matter of the fourth section. The fifth section deals with the Prophet's marriage with Zainab, and refutes the objections advanced against him on that score. The sixth generalizes on the objections raised against his domestic life. The seventh draws the attention of the Muslims to certain rules of conduct in their domestic relations. The eighth speaks of those who spread evil reports, and the ninth closes the chapter with an exhortation to the faithful.

SECTION 1: Religious and Physical Relationship

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

- 1 O Prophet, keep thy duty to Allâh and obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites.^a Surely Allâh is ever Knowing, Wise;
- 2 And follow that which is revealed to thee from your *Rabb*. Surely Allâh is ever Aware of what you do;
- 3 And trust in Allâh. And Allâh is enough as having charge (of affairs).
- 4 Allâh has not made for any man two hearts within him;^a nor has He made your wives whom you desert by *Zihâr*, your mothers, nor has He made those whom you assert (to be your sons) your sons. These are the words of your mouths. And Allâh speaks the truth and He shows the way.^b

1a. The chapter was revealed at a time when the powerful and combined forces of the Arabian tribes threatened Madînah from without and the hypocrites and the Jews assisted them from within to crush the Muslims. It was necessary at such a critical time that the Muslims, who are really addressed here through the Prophet, should not in any way be compliant to their deadly enemies. Or, the meaning is that the Holy Prophet should not be troubled by his critics, for their object was only to carp, and one course of action was as well calculated to give them occasion for carping as another.

4a. This passage does not relate to what follows but sums up what is said in the previous verse. The Prophet is there told not to be compliant to the disbelievers and the hypocrites, but to trust in Allâh alone, because the same heart cannot simultaneously entertain love for Allâh and love for His enemies.

4b. This passage abolishes two customs of the days of ignorance. The first of these is what is called *zihâr* or *muzâhirah*. The word is derived from *zahr*, meaning *back*, and *zihâr* consisted in a man saying to his wife *thou art to me as the back of my mother* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). No sooner were the words pronounced than the relation between husband and wife ended as by a divorce, but the woman was not at liberty to leave the husband's house and marry elsewhere. She remained in the same house, as a deserted wife. The other custom was that of regarding the adopted son as if he were a real son. This passage abolishes both customs on the same ground; a wife cannot be a real mother, or a stranger a real son.

The subject of *zihâr* is fully discussed in the first section of the 58th chapter.

5 Call them by (the names of) their fathers; this is more equitable with Allâh; but if you know not their fathers, then they are your brethren in faith and your friends. And there is no blame on you in that wherein you make a mistake, but (you are answerable for) that which your hearts purpose. And Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

6 The Prophet is closer to the faithful than their own selves, and his wives are (as) their mothers.^a And the possessors of relationship are closer one to another in the ordinance of Allâh than (other) believers, and those who fled (their homes), except that you do some good to your friends.^b This is written in the Book.

7 And when We took a covenant from the prophets and from thee, and from Nûh and Ibrâhîm and Mûsâ and 'Îsâ, son of Maryam, and We took from them a solemn covenant,^a

6a. The Prophet was indeed much more than a father to the believers. He had raised them to the dignity of manhood from a state of savagery; consequently the tie of love which united them to him was stronger than the ordinary ties of love and friendship. The statement that his wives are their mothers - has reference to the religious relationship, because they were helpful in bringing up the faithful devotionally; see 33a and 34a.

6b. When the Muslims first came to Madînah, a brotherhood was established between those who fled and the helpers, one of the former becoming a brother of one of the latter, and each of the two thus united was entitled to a share of inheritance on the death of the other, according to an old Arab custom. The passage abolishes this custom, maintaining only the brotherhood of Islâm in a wider sense, and allowing inheritance only to actual relatives. But a Muslim could assist his brother in Islâm by a gift or by making a will in his favour. This is the significance of the words *except that you do some good to your friends*.

7a. The covenant referred to here is generally supposed to be in relation to the delivery of the message with which the prophets are entrusted. But see 3:81, where the making of a covenant with the prophets is spoken of, and that covenant is, with regard to the advent of the Holy Prophet, referred to in Acts 3:21 and elsewhere; for a full discussion on which see 3:81a. The covenant spoken of as having been made with the Holy Prophet evidently refers to the Prophet's verifying all previous revelation. The prophets: Nûḥ, Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ and 'Îsâ are specially mentioned by name on account of their importance.

8 That He may question the truthfulness of their truth, and He has prepared for the disbelievers a painful chastisement.

SECTION 2: The Allies' Attack on Madînah

9 O you who believe, call to mind the favour of Allâh to you when there came against you hosts,^a so We sent against them a strong wind^b and hosts that you saw not.^c And Allâh is ever Seer of what you do.

10 When they came upon you from above you and from below you,^a and when the eyes turned dull and the hearts rose up to the throats, and you began to think diverse thoughts about Allâh.^b

9a. The events narrated in this section and a part of the following relate to the siege of Madînah by the combined forces of the Quraish and their allies — viz., the Ghatfân, the 'Ashja' and Murrah, the Fazârah, the Sulaim and the Banî Sa'd and Asad, aided by the Jewish tribe of the Banî Nadîr and the Banî Quraizah, the latter of whom had made a treaty of alliance with the Muslims — the entire forces numbering from ten to twenty

thousand according to different versions, while the Muslims were only about thirteen or fourteen hundred. The Prophet decided to remain within the town and a ditch was dug as a protective measure against the onrush of the powerful force. The battle continued for several days, the enemy eventually taking to flight on a stormy night without being able to inflict any loss upon the Muslims.

9b. The reference is to the great hurricane which caused the enemy to flee. Muir says: “Wearied and damped in spirit, the night set in upon them cold and tempestuous. Wind and rain beat mercilessly on the unprotected camp. The storm rose to a hurricane. Fires were extinguished, tents blown down, cooking-vessels and other equipage overthrown”.

9c. The hosts which could not be seen were the angelic hosts which disheartened the enemy. The storm alone would not have made an army of 10,000 to flee in such disorder, was it not that they had already been disheartened by the futility of their attacks upon the besieged Muslims. The angelic assistance is promised in 3:125.

10a. The Ghatfân pitched on the east side of the town, on the higher part of the valley, and the Quraish on the west side, on the lower part of the valley.

10b. Becoming dull of the eyes and the rising of the hearts to the throats indicates the Muslim fear, which was only natural when such a large army was advancing against a mere handful of men. The diverse thoughts signify the fears of the weak-hearted and the hypocrites that Allâh’s promise would not prove true and that the enemy would destroy them. As regards the thoughts of the faithful, see verse 22.

11 There were the believers tried and they were shaken with a severe shaking.

12 And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was a disease began to say: Allâh and His Messenger did not promise us (victory) but only to deceive.^a

13 And when a party of them said: O people of Yathrib,^a you cannot make a stand, so go back.^b And a party of them asked permission of the Prophet, saying, Our houses are exposed. And they were not exposed. They only desired to run away.

14 And if an entry were made upon them from the outlying parts of it, then they were asked to wage war (against the Muslims), they would certainly have done it, and they would not have stayed in it but a little while.^a

15 And they had indeed made a covenant with Allâh before (that) they would not turn (their) backs. And a covenant with Allâh must be answered for.

12a. That the prophecies of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân regarding the ultimate triumph of Islâm and the victory of the Muslims were not vague utterances, but clear and emphatic assertions, is shown by what the hypocrites are related to have said. There was an unmistakable promise of victory, but the circumstances were decidedly against the fulfilment of that promise, and hence the weak-hearted said that the promise of victory was given only to deceive them. It should be noted that the weak-hearted, who did not believe in the ultimate triumph of Islâm, are here classed with the hypocrites.

13a. *Yathrib* was the name by which Madînah was known before the Prophet's flight to that city. On the Prophet's flight there, it received the name of *Madînat al-Nabî* or the City of the Prophet, or simply Madînah.

13b. That is, go back to idolatry to save your lives, or beat a retreat and return to your houses.

14a. These verses describe the condition of the hypocrites, who advanced excuses for not fighting against the opponents of the Muslims. If an enemy had entered into the city from another side and invited them to join hands with him to fight against the Muslims, they would have been ready to fight. The concluding words show that they would have even left Madînah to attack the Muslims and would not then have cared for the protection of their houses.

16 Say: Flight will not profit you, if you flee from death or slaughter, and then you will not be allowed to enjoy yourselves but a little.

17 Say: Who is it that can protect you from Allâh, if He intends harm for you or He intends to show you mercy? And they will not find for themselves a guardian or a helper besides Allâh.

18 Allâh indeed knows those among you who hinder others and those who say to their brethren, Come to us. And they come not to the fight but a little,

19 Being niggardly with respect to you. But when fear comes, thou wilt see them looking to thee, their eyes rolling like one swooning because of death. But when fear is gone they smite you with sharp tongues, being covetous of wealth. These have not believed, so Allâh makes their deeds naught. And that is easy for Allâh.

20 They think the allies are not gone, and if the allies should come (again), they would fain be in the deserts with the desert Arabs, asking for news about you. And if they were among you, they would not fight save a little.

SECTION 3: Allies' Flight: Quraizah punished

21 Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allâh an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allâh and the Latter day, and remembers Allâh much.^a

22 And when the believers saw the allies, they said: This is what Allâh and His Messenger promised us, and Allâh and His Messenger spoke the truth. And it only added to their faith and submission.^a

23 Of the believers are men who are true to the covenant they made with Allâh; so of them is he who has accomplished his vow, and of them is he who yet waits, and they have not changed in the least^a —

21a. This verse points to a most significant truth and a distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Prophet, viz., that he is the best exemplar and the highest model of virtue for the faithful under all circumstances. If he had not led armies, he could not have served as a model for a general leading armies into battle; if he had not fought personally, he could not have been an exemplar for a soldier laying down his life in the cause of truth, justice, and freedom; if he had not made laws for the guidance of his followers, he could never have been regarded as an outstanding example to a legislator; if he had not decided cases, he could not have served as a light to judges and magistrates; if he had not married, he would have left men unguided in practically half of their everyday duties and could not have shown how to be a kind and affectionate husband and a loving father; if he had not taken revenge on tyrants for the wrongs inflicted on innocent persons, if he had not overcome his persecuting enemies and forgiven them, if he had not overlooked the faults of those attached to him, he could not have been an excellent *exemplar* and a *perfect model*, as he is here pronounced to be. Indeed, it is the distinguishing characteristic of his life that he not only gave practical rules of guidance in all walks of life, but gave by his life a practical illustration of all those rules. Two more points are worth noting here. In the first place, the Prophet's being an exemplar is a sufficient answer to all those who

carp at him, because the very necessity of guiding men under varying mundane circumstances and conditions led him through all those circumstances. Secondly, the moral qualities which are latent within human beings remain in a dormant condition unless they are called into action. Hence no one can claim the possession of a high moral quality unless he has had occasion to display it, acquitting himself creditably. The occasion on which the Prophet's being an exemplar for the faithful is pointed out is one on which he showed the greatest firmness in utmost danger, confidence in Divine assistance, and steadfastness in the hardest trials, and the believers are told that they must not lose heart, but follow the example of the Holy Prophet.

22a. The reference here is to the Divine promise that a time would come when the combined forces of Arabia would be put to flight. This promise was given long before, and at a time when the Holy Prophet and his few followers were being severely persecuted at Makkah. Here are the words of one prophecy: "What an army of the allies is here put to flight" (38:11); "Soon shall the hosts be routed and they will show their backs" (54:45), says another. So when the combined forces attacked Madīnah, the words of the prophecy were in the heart of every true Muslim. They rejoiced because they were certain that the combined forces of the enemy would be put to flight. It was only the hypocrites who had misgivings, as the last section shows. The battle had, in fact, inspired greater faith in the ultimate triumph of Islām, not only by bringing earlier prophecies to fulfilment but also because it was here that, when the Holy Prophet smashed a big stone with a hammer (a stone which had proved an obstacle in the digging of the ditch) and a flash of light followed, he announced the mighty prophecy that the flash of light had revealed to him the palaces of the Chosroes and the Caesars, and that he had been informed that his followers would be triumphant over both the empires (*Musnad* of Imām *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (*Ḥadīth*) IV, p. 303).

24 That Allāh may reward the truthful for their truth, and chastise the hypocrites, if He please, or turn to them (mercifully). Surely Allāh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.^a

25 And Allāh turned back the disbelievers in their rage — they gained no advantage. And Allāh sufficed the believers in fighting. And Allāh is ever Strong, Mighty.

26 And He drove down those of the People of the Book who backed them from their fortresses and He cast awe into their hearts; some you killed and you took captive some.^a

27 And He made you heirs to their land and their dwellings and their property, and (to) a land which you have not yet trodden. And Allāh is ever Possessor of power over all things.^a

23a. Some of the believers had become martyrs in the cause of truth; others yet waited, anxious to lay down their lives in the same cause.

24a. It is clearly stated here, as also in v. 17, that all the hypocrites would not be punished, but that Allāh would be merciful to them, punishing only such as deserved to be punished. Thus it happened that most of them became afterwards sincere converts to Islām.

26a. The Banî Quraizah were in alliance with the Holy Prophet, and when the enemy laid siege to Madînah, they were bound to repel the attack; see 2:84a. Instead of this they sided with the invading army. Muir admits that “it was agreed that the Quraizah would assist the Quraish”, and though he doubts whether “they entered on active hostilities”, there is the surest testimony that they had made an agreement with the Quraish to attack the Muslims from within. Therefore, when the besieging army took to flight and the Quraizah returned to their fortress, it was besieged by the Holy Prophet, for to leave such an internal enemy unpunished would have been a source of ever-present danger to the safety of the Muslim community. They remained besieged for twenty-five days, and then expressed their willingness to surrender, on condition that they should submit to the sentence of punishment pronounced by Sa’d ibn Mu’adh. Had they trusted the Prophet, he would probably have given them the same punishment as he gave to the Qainuqâ’, viz., emigration, but Sa’d was exasperated by their treachery and his judgment was that the fighting men should be put to death and the rest made captives (Bukhârî 56:168). This was in accordance with the Jewish Law: “And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself” (Deuteronomy 20:12 – 14). Three hundred men suffered death under this sentence, and their lands fell into the hands of the Muslims.

SECTION 4: Prophet's Domestic Simplicity

28 O Prophet, say to thy wives: If you desire this world's life and its adornment, come, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a goodly departing.^a

29 And if you desire Allâh and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter, then surely Allâh has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward.

30 O wives of the Prophet, whoever of you is guilty of manifestly improper conduct, the chastisement will be doubled for her. And this is easy for Allâh. ^a

27a. The *land which you have not yet trodden* refers to the foreign lands which are here promised to the Muslims and which they conquered later.

28a. The introduction of the subject of the Holy Prophet's simplicity in domestic life is most fitting here. The Muslims were now growing powerful and wealthier. The victory at Badr, and the possession of the lands and property of the Quraizah, had increased their wealth. It was natural, in the circumstances that the wives of the Prophet should desire to be furnished with better necessities of life than they had previously enjoyed. But just at this time we find a revelation enjoining the strictest simplicity upon them. These strictures could not emanate from an impostor, nor even from a man of the world whose power and wealth were increasing daily. If the Prophet had allowed his wives to share in the general prosperity of the community, there could not have been the least objection. But he received a revelation which deprived him and those most nearly related to him of those material benefits which others could easily acquire. The splendours of this world could be obtained, and were not forbidden to any Muslim, but such transitory vanities were not to be admitted into the household of Allâh's Prophet. As he possessed the means, his wives would be allowed to depart with rich and ample gifts, if such was their desire. This passage also throws light on the object of the Prophet's marriages, for if his object were sensual enjoyment, he could not have been ready to sacrifice the ease and comforts attendant upon mere carnal desire to the retention of that Spartan simplicity enjoined upon his household.

31 And whoever of you is obedient to Allâh and His Messenger and does good, We shall give her a double reward, and We have prepared for her an honourable sustenance.^a

32 O wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you would keep your duty, be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease yearn; and speak a word of goodness.^a

33 And stay in your houses and display not (your beauty) like the displaying of the ignorance of yore; and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-rate, and obey Allâh and His Messenger. Allâh only desires to take away uncleanness from you, O people of the household, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying.^a

30a. The word *fâhishah* means *any evil exceeding the proper bounds, anything not agreeable with truth and with rule or measure, or anything unseemly* (Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane). As already shown in 4:19c, it includes *hatred and desertion of the husband, doing harm to the husband and his family*. It does not necessarily mean *adultery* or *lewdness*. Hence many commentators take the word *fâhishah* here in its broadest sense as meaning anything which may give offence to the Prophet.

It should be noted that not only are the Prophet's wives denied the comforts of life which were available to other Muslim ladies, but any unseemly conduct on their part brought double the ordinary punishment. Could this be the work of an impostor? In their case the punishment is increased because, being in the Prophet's house, they had a better chance to be guided aright and to pass their lives in the greatest purity. It should be noted that there is no actual occurrence of the least indecency on the part of any of the Prophet's wives.

31a. The double reward spoken of here means only greater reward, as the words *honourable sustenance* show. The greater reward is due to their having denied themselves the ordinary comforts of life by remaining in the Prophet's house.

32a. Though the injunction is given in particular to the wives of the Prophet, it is really a rule of life for all Muslim women, and promotes purity of heart and chastity in the relations between the sexes. They are not forbidden to speak to men, but, as a safeguard against possible inclination of the heart to evil thoughts, they are told not to indulge in

soft and amorous conversation with the opposite sex. The wives of the Prophet are here told that they were not like other women, as they had to come in contact with large numbers of people, who would come to them to learn the treasures of wisdom which they received from the Prophet. An allusion to this is contained in the concluding words of the verse, *and speak a word of goodness*.

34 And remember that which is recited in your houses of the messages of Allâh and the Wisdom. Surely Allâh is ever Knower of subtilities, Aware.^a

SECTION 5: Prophet's Marriage with Zainab

35 Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allâh much and women who remember — Allâh has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.^a

33a. The means of purification are suggested in the previous verses: to observe the utmost simplicity of life, to avoid every indecency, and not to display their beauty to others. The uncleanness which Allâh will thus take away is the uncleanness of the desire for worldly riches. As the Prophet himself was an exemplar to the faithful, so was his household to be an example of simplicity and purity to Muslim women; hence they are called *mothers of the faithful*; see 6a.

It should also be noted that the Prophet's wives are here addressed as *ahl al-bait*, or *the people of the household*, they being primarily so, while his children and children's children may also be included. The use of the phrase *ahl al-bait* on the only two other occasions in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân is to signify the wife, as in the case of Ibrâhîm's wife (11:73) and Amrân's wife or Mûsâ's mother (28:12), and this use also shows that it is the wife, who is mistress of the house, that is indicated by the phrase *ahl al-bait*. Thus under this verse the Prophet's children could only claim a sanctity in which his wives

also shared. It is a fact that not only did the wives of the Prophet retain the utmost simplicity of life in his lifetime, but even after his death, when the Muslims grew a very wealthy nation and big stipends were paid to the Prophet's wives, they did not allow wealth to accumulate in their houses but distributed it to deserving people. Of 'Â'ishah especially it is related that she was so generous in giving away what came to her that she would sometimes be left without the means for an evening meal.

34a. The wives of the Prophet were not only to serve as models of virtue to the faithful, men as well as women, but they were also required to teach the precepts of religion, of that which was recited in their houses of the messages of Allâh and of Wisdom, to the faithful. Hence they are told that they must remember not only the injunctions of the Holy Qur'ân — the messages of Allâh — but also the Wisdom which the Prophet taught by his practice and word, i.e., the Sunnah.

36 And it behoves not a believing man or a believing woman, when Allâh and His Messenger have decided an affair, to exercise a choice in their matter. And whoever disobeys Allâh and His Messenger, he surely strays off to manifest error.^a

37 And when you said to him to whom Allâh had shown favour and to whom you had shown a favour: Keep your wife to yourself and keep your duty to Allâh; and you concealed in your heart what Allâh would bring to light, and you feared men, and Allâh has a greater right that you should fear Him. So when Zaid dissolved her marriage-tie, We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers about the wives of their adopted sons, when they have dissolved their marriage-tie. And Allâh's command is ever performed.^a

35a. This verse repeats ten times that women can attain every good quality to which men can have access and settles it conclusively that according to the Qur'ân women stand on the same religious level as men.

36a. All commentators agree that this verse was revealed on the occasion when the Holy Prophet demanded Zainab, his cousin through his aunt, in marriage for Zaid, his adopted son. Both Zainab and her brother were averse to this match, because Zaid was a freedman, and it was in obedience to this revelation that their scruples were overcome and Zainab accepted Zaid for her husband (*Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*

(Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad *ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî*; *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî; *Kashshâf* (Commentary), by Abu-l-Qâsim Maḥmûd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharî and the *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur‘ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Ṣafî al-Dîn). The verse has no connection with the subsequent events, which brought about the divorce and Zainab’s marriage with the Holy Prophet. It, moreover, shows that it was the Prophet himself who had arranged this marriage between Zainab and Zaid, and were it not in deference to his wishes, Zainab would never have consented to the alliance.

37a. This verse consists of two distinct and separate parts, the first dealing with Zaid’s divorce of Zainab, and the second beginning with *so when Zaid*, etc., with the Holy Prophet’s marriage with Zainab, and therefore a full explanation of the events in connection with this marriage is necessary. Zaid belonged to the tribe of Kalb, and was taken prisoner in childhood and sold as a slave at Makkah, where he was bought by Khadijah’s brother, who gave him over to his sister, and she in turn presented him to the Holy Prophet, who, as was his wont, liberated him. But Zaid was so much attached to the Holy Prophet, that when the Prophet gave him the option of accompanying his father to his home or of remaining with him, Zaid chose the latter course. On account of his great attachment, Zaid was called the son of Muḥammad, and he was one of the early converts to Islâm. It is to these events that the opening words of the verse refer, when they speak of Zaid as being one to whom Allâh as well as the Prophet had shown favour.

Zainab was the daughter of the Prophet’s own aunt, Umaymah, daughter of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. She was one of the early converts to Islâm, and the Holy Prophet proposed to her brother that she should be given in marriage to Zaid. Both brother and sister were averse to this match, and only yielded under pressure from the Holy Prophet, for which see the last note. It is related that they both desired that the Holy Prophet himself should marry Zainab. In fact, when marriage was first proposed to Zainab, she gave her assent under the impression that the Prophet wanted her for himself (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî), but the Prophet insisted that she should accept Zaid (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur‘ân* (Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad *ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî*).

The marriage was, however, not a happy one. Zainab was harsh of temper, and she never liked Zaid on account of the stigma of slavery, which attached to his name. Differences arose, and Zaid expressed a desire to the Holy Prophet of divorcing Zainab. The news was grieving for the Prophet, for it was he who had insisted upon the marriage, and he therefore advised Zaid not to divorce her. He feared that people would object that a marriage which had been arranged by the Prophet was unsuccessful. According to one interpretation, it is to this circumstance that the words refer, *and you feared human beings, and Allâh has a greater right that you should fear Him*. According to this interpretation it is also to the same matter that the words *and you concealed in your heart what Allâh would bring to light* refer, for the Prophet did not like that the disagreements between Zainab and Zaid should become generally known. The Prophet's injunction to Zaid not to divorce his wife is contained in unmistakable terms in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. But it was all in vain, and Zaid at last divorced Zainab. According to another interpretation, however, the words *and you concealed in your heart to you should fear Him*, are a continuation of the advice which the Prophet gave to Zaid not to divorce Zainab (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). This interpretation suits the context even better than the first interpretation, for as we are further on told in verse 39, the prophets fear none but Allâh.

After Zainab was divorced the Holy Prophet took her in marriage that being the wish of the lady and her relatives before her marriage to Zaid, and the Prophet was, now that the marriage arranged by him proved unsuccessful, morally bound to accept their wishes. Moreover, the Qur'ân had declared against an adopted son being regarded as if he were a real son, and now there was an opportunity where the Holy Prophet could by his own example deal a death-blow to that custom. This reason is plainly given in the second part of the verse: *We gave her to thee as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers about the wives of their adopted sons*. The Qur'ân does not give any other reason for the marriage.

This simple story is made the basis of a mean attack on the Holy Prophet. It is stated that the Prophet, having seen Zainab by chance through a half-open door, was fascinated by her beauty, and that Zaid, having come to know of this, divorced her, and then she became the Prophet's wife. That Muir and Arnold, not to mention more prejudiced writers, accept this, only shows how far religious prejudice may carry

“criticism”. It is admitted that Zainab was the daughter of the Prophet’s real aunt; it is admitted that she was one of the early believers in Islâm who fled to Madînah; it is admitted that the Prophet himself had arranged the marriage between Zaid and Zainab; and finally it is admitted that Zainab desired, as did also her brother, before she was married to Zaid, that she should be taken in marriage by the Holy Prophet. What were it then which prevented the Prophet from marrying her when she was a virgin? Had he not seen her before? He was so closely related to her that on the face of it such a supposition is absurd. Then there was no seclusion of women before Zainab’s marriage with the Prophet, a fact the truth of which is attested by Muir himself. Having not only seen her when she was a virgin, but knowing her fully well on account of her close relationship to him and her early belief in Islâm, while both she and her relatives were desirous that the Prophet should take her for a wife, what hindered the Prophet from marrying her? The story is so absurd that any human being possessing ordinary common sense would unhesitatingly reject it.

38 There is no harm for the Prophet in that which Allâh has ordained for him. Such has been the way of Allâh with those who have gone before. And the command of Allâh is a decree that is made absolute —

39 Those who deliver the messages of Allâh and fear Him, and fear none but Allâh. And Allâh is Sufficient to take account.

40 Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allâh and the Seal of the prophets. And Allâh is ever Knower of all things.^a

40a. The word *khâtam* means *a seal* or *the last part* or *portion* of a thing, the latter being the primary significance of the word *khâtim*. It may further be noted that *khâtam al-qaum* always means *the last of the people* - *âkhiru-hum* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faid Murtadâ* and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Though the Holy Prophet was admittedly the last of the prophets, and even history shows that no prophet appeared after him in the world, yet the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân has adopted the word *khâtam* and not *khâtim*, because a deeper significance is carried in the phrase *Seal of the prophets* than mere *finality*. In fact, it indicates *finality* combined with *perfection of prophethood*, along with *a continuance* among his followers of certain

*blessings of prophethood. He is the Seal of the prophets because with him the object of prophethood, the manifestation of Divine will in Laws which should guide humanity, was finally accomplished in the revelation of a perfect law in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, and he is also the Seal of the prophets because certain favours bestowed on prophets were forever to continue among his followers. The office of the prophet was only necessary to guide men, either by giving them a law or by removing the imperfections of a previously existing law, or by giving certain new directions to meet the requirements of the times, because the circumstances of earlier human society did not allow the revelation of a perfect law which should suit the requirements of different generations or different places. Hence prophets were constantly raised. But through the Holy Prophet a perfect law was given, suiting the requirements of all ages and all countries, and this law was guarded against all corruption, and the office of the prophet was therefore no more required. But this did not mean that the Divine favours bestowed on His chosen servants were to be denied to the chosen ones among the Muslims. Human beings did not need a new law, because they had a perfect law with them, but they did stand in need of receiving Divine favours. The highest of these favours is Divine inspiration, and it is recognized by Islâm that the Divine Being speaks to His chosen ones now as He spoke in the past, but such people are not prophets in the real sense of the word. According to a most reliable hadîth, the Prophet said “there will be in my community”, i.e., among the Muslims, “men who will be spoken to (by Allâh), though they will not be prophets” (Bukhârî 62:6). According to another version of the same hadîth, such people are given the name *muhaddath* (Bukhârî 62:6).*

What is stated above is corroborated by a saying of the Holy Prophet: *Nothing has remained of prophethood except mubashsharât*, i.e., *good news*. And being asked what was meant by *mubashsharât*, or *good news*, he said: “True visions” (Bukhârî 91:5). According to another hadîth, he is reported to have said: “The vision of the believer is one of the forty-six parts of prophethood” (Bukhârî 91:4). Prophethood itself has gone, but one of its blessings remains, and will exist forever among the followers of the Holy Prophet.

SECTION 6: The Prophet's Marriages

41 O you who believe, remember Allâh with much remembrance,

42 And glorify Him morning and evening.

43 He it is Who sends blessings on you, and (so do) His *malâ'ikah*, that He may bring you forth out of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.^a

44 Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be, Peace! and He has prepared for them an honourable reward.

45 O Prophet, surely We have sent you as a witness, and a bearer of good news and a warner,

43a. This section deals with the marriages and divorces of the Prophet and fittingly opens with a statement showing how the Holy Prophet had made Allâh the greatest force in the lives of a people who had never known Allâh. Again it was by means of the transformation wrought by him that his companions were led out of the darkness of ignorance. Could it then be that the man who purified others was himself impure? Could a sensual human being, a slave of his passions, turn a nation of idolatrous and ignorant human beings into a godly people? This argument is expanded and made lucid in the verses that follow.

46 And as an inviter to Allâh by His permission, and as a light-giving sun.^a

47 And give the believers the good news that they will have great grace from Allâh.

48 And obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and disregard their annoying talk,^a and rely on Allâh. And Allâh is enough as having charge (of affairs).

49 O you who believe, when you marry believing women, then divorce them before you touch them, you have in their case no term which you should reckon.^a But make provision for them and set them free in a goodly manner.

46a. The words clearly imply that one who could give light to others and raise them from the depth of vice and immorality to the height of purity and perfection could not himself be in the darkness of impurity. The Prophet is here spoken of first as one bearing witness to lost humanity, to human beings who had lost all idea of Allâh-consciousness, that there is an Allâh. More than that he was *a bearer of good news* to humanity that Allâh still remembered mankind, and that He had sent His Prophet to make this fallen humanity rise

to religious eminence by holding communion with Him, but at the same time he was a *warner*, too, and told them that, if they persisted in their evil ways, they would suffer evil consequences; thus he was an *Inviter* to Allâh and the *Sun of righteousness*.

48a. In the mention of *annoying talk* there is a clear reference to the carpings of his petty-minded critics, who try to misrepresent the greatest source of righteousness which the world has ever witnessed, as an evil. The Prophet is told to disregard this annoying talk, as the time would come when the question would be asked, as it is already being asked, how is it that the Prophet illumined the world and opened the flood-gates of light to a benighted world, if it was darkness that reigned supreme in his own mind?

49a. The reason for putting this ordinance here, in speaking of the Holy Prophet's marriages, seems to apply to the Holy Prophet's marriage with a woman named Asmâ', daughter of Nu'mân Kindî. Before he went in to her she asked for a divorce, and the Prophet released her as she had desired. It is related that 'Umar decided against her being regarded as a wife of the Prophet.

50 O Prophet, We have made lawful to you your wives^a whom you have given their dowries, and those whom your right hand possesses, out of those whom Allâh has given you as prisoners of war, and the daughters of thy paternal uncle and the daughters of your paternal aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncle and the daughters of your maternal aunts who fled with you; and a believing woman, if she gives herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desires to marry her. (It is) especially for you, not for the believers^b — We know what We have ordained for them concerning their wives and those whom their right hands possess in order that no blame may attach to you. And Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

50a. That his wives were lawful for the Prophet goes without saying. It appears that this revelation came after 4:3, which limits the number of wives a man can take under exceptional circumstances to four. The Prophet was, however, told that he should not divorce the excess number for this reason.

The marriages of the Holy Prophet have furnished his critics with the chief implement of attack on him, and the low-minded missionary has gone so far as to call him a voluptuary on that account, though he dare not apply that word to the husband of a

hundred wives. Therefore I give below full particulars regarding the Prophet's marriages. His life as regards his marriages may be divided into four periods. Briefly these are: (1) A celibate life up to twenty-five. (2) A married state with one wife from 25 to 54. (3) Several marriages from 54 to 60. (4) No further marriage after 60. As regards the first period, the life of a celibate youth living in a warm country till 25, the testimony of a hostile writer like Sir William Muir is that "all authorities agree in ascribing to the youth of Muḥammad a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of Mecca". In fact, in Arabia at the time profligacy was the order of the day and it was among people who prided themselves on loose sexual relations that the Prophet led a life of transcendent purity.

Then comes the second period from 25 to 54. His first marriage was contracted while he was twenty-five years of age, and the widow Khadijah whom he married was forty years old, i.e., fifteen years his senior. It was with her, and her alone, that he passed all the years of his youth and manhood until she died three years before the Hijrah, when he was already an old man of fifty. This circumstance alone is sufficient to give the lie to those carpers who call him a voluptuary. After her death, while still at Makkah, he married Saudah, a widow of advanced age. He also married 'Ā'ishah, his only virgin wife, while still at Makkah, but her marriage was consummated five years afterwards in the 2nd year of the Hijrah.

Then followed the flight to Madīnah, and subsequent to the Flight he had to fight many battles with his enemies, the Quraish, or such tribes as sided with the Quraish. The result of these battles was a great discrepancy between the number of males and females, and as his favourite followers fell in the field of battle fighting with his enemies, the care of their families devolved upon the Prophet and his surviving companions. In the battle of Badr fell Khunais, son of Hudhâfah, and the faithful 'Umar's daughter Hafsah was left a widow. 'Umar offered her to 'Uthmân and Abû Bakr in turn, and she was at last married by the Holy Prophet in the third year of the Hijrah. 'Abd Allâh, son of Jahsh, fell a martyr at Uhud, and his widow Zainab, daughter of Khuzaimah, was taken in marriage by the Prophet in the same year. In the next year Abû Salamah died, and his widow, Umm Salamah, was taken to wife by the Prophet. The events are narrated in the last section, leading to Zainab's divorce by Zaid; the Prophet married her in the fifth year of the Hijrah under circumstances already narrated. Umm Habîbah was one of his devoted

followers who fled to Abyssinia with her husband, ‘Ubaid Allâh, who there became a Christian, and when he died his widow found comfort in being taken as a wife by the Holy Prophet in the seventh year of the Hijrah.

Besides these widows of his faithful followers whom it fell to his lot to take under his protection, the Prophet took three widows of his enemies in marriage, and in each case this step led to the union and pacification of a whole tribe. These three, Juwairiyah, Maimûnah and Safiyyah, he married in the years six and seven of the Hijrah. Regarding one of these, it is sufficient to note that, when the Prophet took Juwairiyah for a wife, over a hundred families of the tribe of the Banî Muşţaliq, to which tribe she belonged, were at once liberated by the Muslims.

The fourth period is that when war came to an end; a reference to this is contained in v. 52: “It is not allowed to you to take wives after this”.

Thus it will be seen that all the marriages of the Prophet were due either to feelings of compassion for the widows of his faithful followers or to put a stop to bloodshed and ensure union with some tribe. Compare also 4:3a, where it is shown that the permission for polygamy was given under similar circumstances; in fact, many of the companions had to follow the example of the Prophet.

51 You may put off whom you pleasest of them, and take to you whom you pleasest. And whom you desirest of those whom you had separated provisionally, no blame attaches to you. This is most proper so that their eyes may be cool and they may not grieve, and that they should be pleased, all of them, with what thou givest them.^a And Allâh knows what is in your hearts. And Allâh is ever Knowing, Forbearing.

50b. As pointed out in the beginning of the last note, the Prophet was specially allowed to retain all his wives when the number allowed was brought down to four in the case of other believers. This was the only privilege allowed to the Prophet and it is to this that the words, *especially for thee*, refer. What Allâh *ordained for the believers* is contained in 4:3, and on the revelation of that verse any Muslim who had more than four wives had to divorce the excess number.

51a. This verse must be read along with verses 28 and 29, where a choice is given to the Prophet’s wives to remain with him or to depart. A similar choice is given here to the

Prophet. And when his wives preferred to lead simple lives with him rather than seek worldly goods by leaving him, the Prophet was no less considerate for their feelings; for notwithstanding the choice given to him to retain such of his wives as he liked, he did not exercise this choice to the disadvantage of anyone of them, but retained them all, as they had chosen to remain with him. A reference is, indeed, contained to verses 28 and 29 in the words *that they should be pleased, all of them, with what thou givest them*, which indicate that this was altogether a new arrangement in which both parties were given free choice and both sacrificed all other considerations to the sanctity of the marriage-tie.

52 It is not allowed to you to take wives after this,^a nor to change them for other wives,^b though their beauty be pleasing to you, except those whom your right hand possesses.^c And Allâh is ever Watchful over all things.

SECTION 7: Rules of Conduct in Domestic Relations

53 O you who believe, enter not the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you for a meal, not waiting for its cooking being finished — but when you are invited, enter, and when you have taken food, disperse — not seeking to listen to talk. Surely this gives the Prophet trouble, but he forbears from you, and Allâh forbears not from the truth. And when you ask of them any goods, ask of them from behind a curtain.^a This is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it behoves you not to give trouble to the Messenger of Allâh, or to marry his wives after him ever.^b Surely this is grievous in the sight of Allâh.

52a. When the Prophet's wives chose to remain with him, limitation was placed upon the Holy Prophet, viz., that he should not take any other wife. The Prophet did not contract any marriage after the seventh year of the Hijrah, when this verse was revealed.

52b. This is another limitation, viz., that it was not after this allowed to the Prophet to divorce anyone of those who had chosen to remain with him.

52c. By *those whom thy right hand possesses* are indicated the wives of the Prophet whom he had lawfully married.

53a. Bigoted critics discover personal motives even in these beautiful rules of conduct. It must be borne in mind that any rule of conduct to be observed in relation to the Holy

Prophet is really a rule that must be observed in all social relations. The Qur'ân teaches not only high morals, but also good manners, for it is meant for all human beings. In this verse it disparages the custom of giving trouble to the owner of a house who invites his friends to a dinner by coming before the appointed time or staying after dinner to indulge in idle talk. This is a rule which the Muslims were desired to observe towards one another as well as towards the Holy Prophet. Similarly, the rule relating to strangers speaking to women from behind a curtain applies equally to all, and is not to be observed only towards the Prophet's wives. Every stranger is not free to enter another Muslim's house and disturb the privacy of those residing in it.

54 If you do a thing openly or do it in secret, then surely Allâh is ever Knower of all things.

55 There is no blame on them in respect of their fathers, nor their sons, nor their brothers, nor their brothers' sons, nor their sisters' sons, nor their own women, nor of what their right hands possess — and (ye women) keep your duty to Allâh. Surely Allâh is ever Witness over all things.

56 Surely Allâh and His *malâ'ikah* bless the Prophet. O you who believe, call for blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.^a

57 Surely those who annoy^a Allâh and His Messenger, Allâh has cursed them in this world and the Hereafter, and He has prepared for them an abasing chastisement.

58 And those who annoy believing men and believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin.

53b. The respect due to the Prophet is alone a sufficient reason for the injunction, but a little consideration will show that the absence of the injunction would have led to difficulties. One of the objects which the Prophet's marriages served was the faithful communication of incidents that play an important part in the life of a human being, but whose knowledge is only limited to a man's family circle. The remarriage of any of the Prophet's widows would have surely impaired this object to a great degree, as it would have had a possible effect upon the independence of opinion of the lady who entered into marital obligations with another man.

56a. The invocation of Divine blessings on the Holy Prophet is mentioned in connection with the false imputations against him as regards his marital relations, the implication being that all such imputations would be brought to naught by the blessings which Allâh would shower on him, showing that he is pure and holds communion with the fountain-head of purity.

57a. The word *yu'dhûn* occurring here is from the root *adhâ*, which occurs in verse 48 in this chapter and in 3:186, and means the annoying talk of the disbelievers and the hypocrites in the form of false imputations against the Holy Prophet. This sense of the word is made clear in the next verse, where the same word is used about the believers, and is explained in the concluding words of the verse as indicating *a false accusation against them*.

SECTION 8: Those who spread Evil Reports

59 O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of believers to let down upon them their over-garments. This is more proper, so that they may be known, and not be given trouble. And Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.^a

60 If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease and the agitators in Madînah desist not, We shall certainly urge you on against them, then they shall not be your neighbours in it but for a little while —

61 Accursed, wherever they are found they will be seized and slain.^a

62 That was the way of Allâh concerning those who have gone before; and you will find no change in the way of Allâh.

63 Human beings ask you about the Hour.

Say: The knowledge of it is only with Allâh. And what will make you comprehend that the Hour may be nigh?^a

64 Surely Allâh has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a burning Fire,

59a. The injunction to wear an over-garment is here given with the object that free women may be distinguished from slaves, so that they may not be annoyed and followed by men inclined to evil, who would come to know by this mark of distinction that these were pure and chaste women who would not tolerate insult or ill-treatment.

61a. This verse and the one that follows relate to hypocrites as well as to certain Jews who spread evil reports concerning the Muslims. Before the Prophet died, Madînah was cleared of these mischievous elements.

65 To abide therein for a long time; they will find neither protector nor helper.

66 On the day when their leaders are turned back into the Fire, they say: O would that we had obeyed Allâh and obeyed the Messenger!

67 And they say: Our *Rabb*, we only obeyed our leaders and our great men, so they led us astray from the path.

68 Our Lord, give them a double chastisement and curse them with a great curse.

SECTION 9: An Exhortation to the Faithful

69 O you who believe, be not like those who maligned Mûsâ, but Allâh cleared him of what they said. And he was worthy of regard with Allâh.^a

70 O you, who believe, keep your duty to Allâh and speak straight words:

71 He will put your deeds into a right state for you, and forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allâh and His Messenger, he indeed achieves a mighty success.

72 Surely We offered the trust to the *samâwât* and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and human beings has turned unfaithful to it. Surely he is ever unjust, ignorant^a —

63a. By the *Hour* is meant the *hour of their doom*, as prophesied in the previous verses.

69a. The false imputation against Mûsâ by his own people. As this chapter deals with false imputations, the case of a false imputation against the prophet in whose likeness the Holy Prophet came is cited, and attention is drawn to the fate of those who had taken part in the accusation. The false accusations against the Holy Prophet are all forged by his opponents.

73 That Allâh may chastise the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women and the polytheistic men and the polytheistic women, and Allâh will turn (mercifully) to the believing men and the believing women. And Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

72a. *Ḥamala-l-amânata* (lit., *he bore the trust*) means *he was unfaithful to the trust* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). *Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faiḍ Murtaḍâ* explains *yahmilna-hâ* as meaning *they were unfaithful to it*, and *ḥamala-ha linsânu* as meaning *human beings was unfaithful to it. Not bearing the trust signifies that they paid it back, and everyone who is unfaithful to a trust is said to have borne it* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faiḍ Murtaḍâ*). The meaning is that nature is true to its laws which bring about its evolution, but a human being is not true to the laws on which depends his real happiness.